

# Funding woes delay nationwide EPA cleanups

## ■ Inspector General releases report on EPA cleanup site delays

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Reduced funding for the Superfund program has resulted in delays and cutbacks at cleanup sites around the country, the Environmental Protection

Agency's inspector general concluded in a report issued last week.

The report was issued at the request of U.S. representatives John Dingell of Michigan and Hilda Solis of California and senators Barbara Boxer of California and Jim Jeffords of Vermont.

While regional officials indicated that they had sufficient funding for the majority of sites for fiscal year 2003, a limited number of sites did not, EPA inspector general Nikki Tinsley reported.

"When funding is not sufficient, construction at National Priority List sites cannot begin; cleanups are performed in less than an optimal manner; and/or activities are stretched over longer periods of time," Tinsley reported. "As a result, total project costs may increase and actions needed to fully address the human health and environmental risk posed by the contaminants are delayed."

The funding shortfall is estimated at around \$175 million.

Some EPA officials told Tinsley that

expected budget limitations were a factor in developing their estimates for FY 2003.

"Some regional officials informed us that cleanup work is conducted differently than it was conducted when full funding was available," Tinsley reported. "Limited funding forces work at certain sites to be phased and/or scaled back to accommodate available funding."

See **EPA report** on Page 5

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# EPA report

Continued from Page 1

Although emergency removal actions were found to have been sufficiently funded in general, officials at several sites reported funding-related difficulties. In some cases, shortcuts such as fencing a site or placing leaking drums in sealed containers instead of removing contaminated soil were reported.

At 11 sites where work was scheduled to begin, the start of cleanup was postponed because funds were not available and the sites were not ranked high enough by the National Priority Panel.

Libby was one of four ongoing cleanup sites singled out in the report as receiving insufficient funding. The others are the Bunker Hill site at Coeur d'Alene, where work on lead contamination in a residential area was delayed; the Roebling Steel site in New Jersey, where

demolition of an asbestos-containing building was postponed; and the Welsbach site, also in New Jersey, where cleanup was scaled back at the primary work site and postponed at other areas after the extent of radioactive contamination associated with the manufacture of gas lamp mantles was found to be greater than expected.

In Libby, funding for the cleanup of asbestos-contaminated vermiculite was made available for the Libby area but not for the former mine site or for

residential cleanups in Troy.

"Region 8 officials indicated that the region could have used another \$3.7 million," Tinsley reported. "The additional funds would have enabled the region to analyze more samples to help characterize the site and to conduct a study to determine how clean the site should be."

"I think the report is accurate and it speaks to the fact that EPA is short of funds," said local project manager Jim Christiansen. "You can't blame EPA for that. We need money to

get the job done in Libby and other places."

Numerous agency officials have promised that the EPA would do everything it can to expedite the Libby cleanup, and those promises need to be kept, said local asbestos victims' advocate Gayla Benefield.

"Because we were considered the number one priority for the EPA and still are, this is unconscionable," Benefield said.

Reduced funding will either take away from the quality of the cleanup or extend the time

period required to 12 to 15 years instead of the promised three to five, Benefield said.

Libby should be given special consideration by the agency, even if overall funding for the

Superfund program is reduced, Benefield said.

"There's nowhere else where there's such an ongoing health risk as there is in Libby," she said.